

The President's Daily Brief

20 March 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

20 March 1972

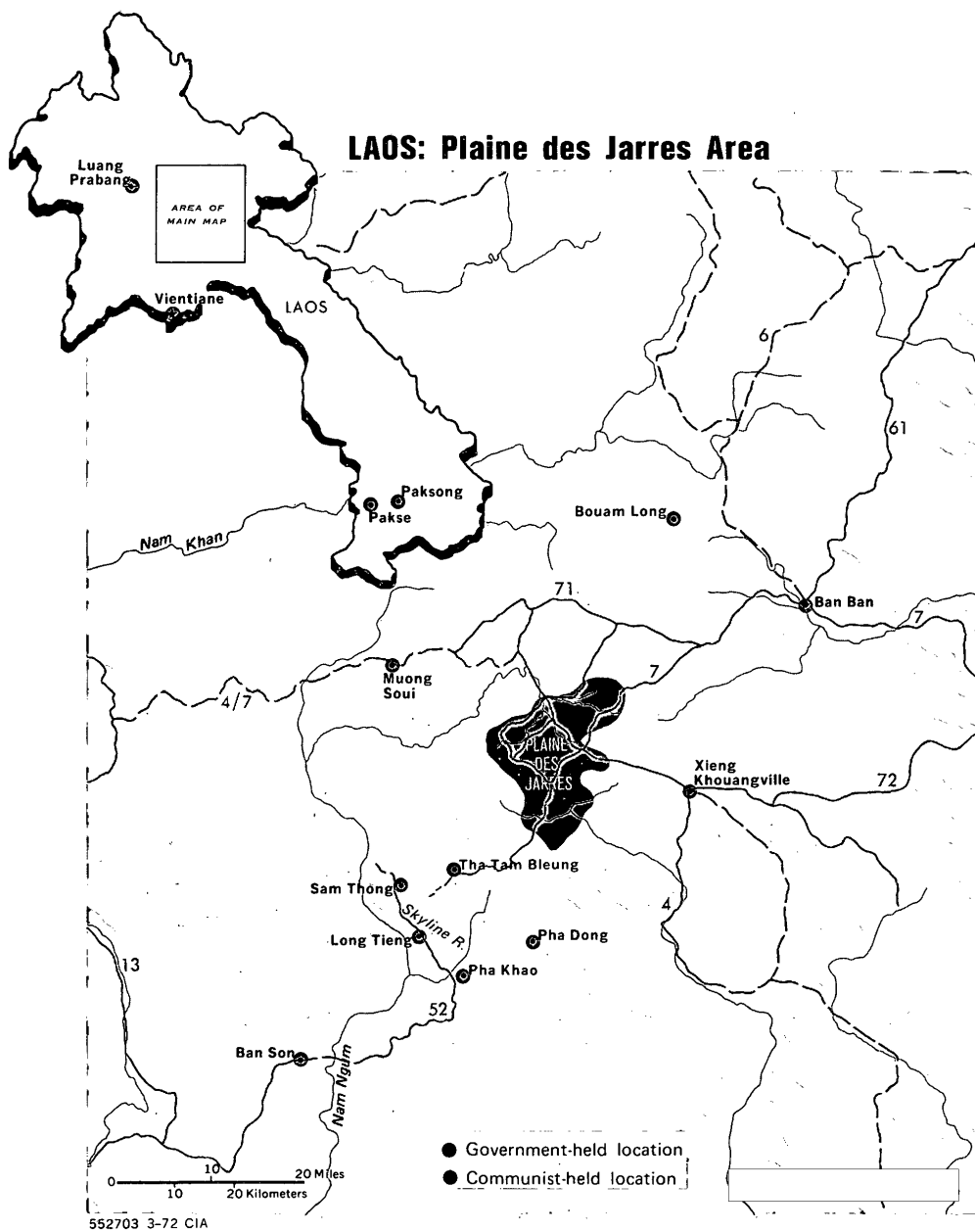
PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The battle for Long Tieng resumed on Saturday.
(Page 1)

Enemy main force units are moving from the mountains on the Laotian border toward South Vietnamese coastal targets near Hue. (Page 2)

Son Ngoc Thanh's appointment as prime minister of Cambodia should ease political tensions. (Page 3)

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY



25X1

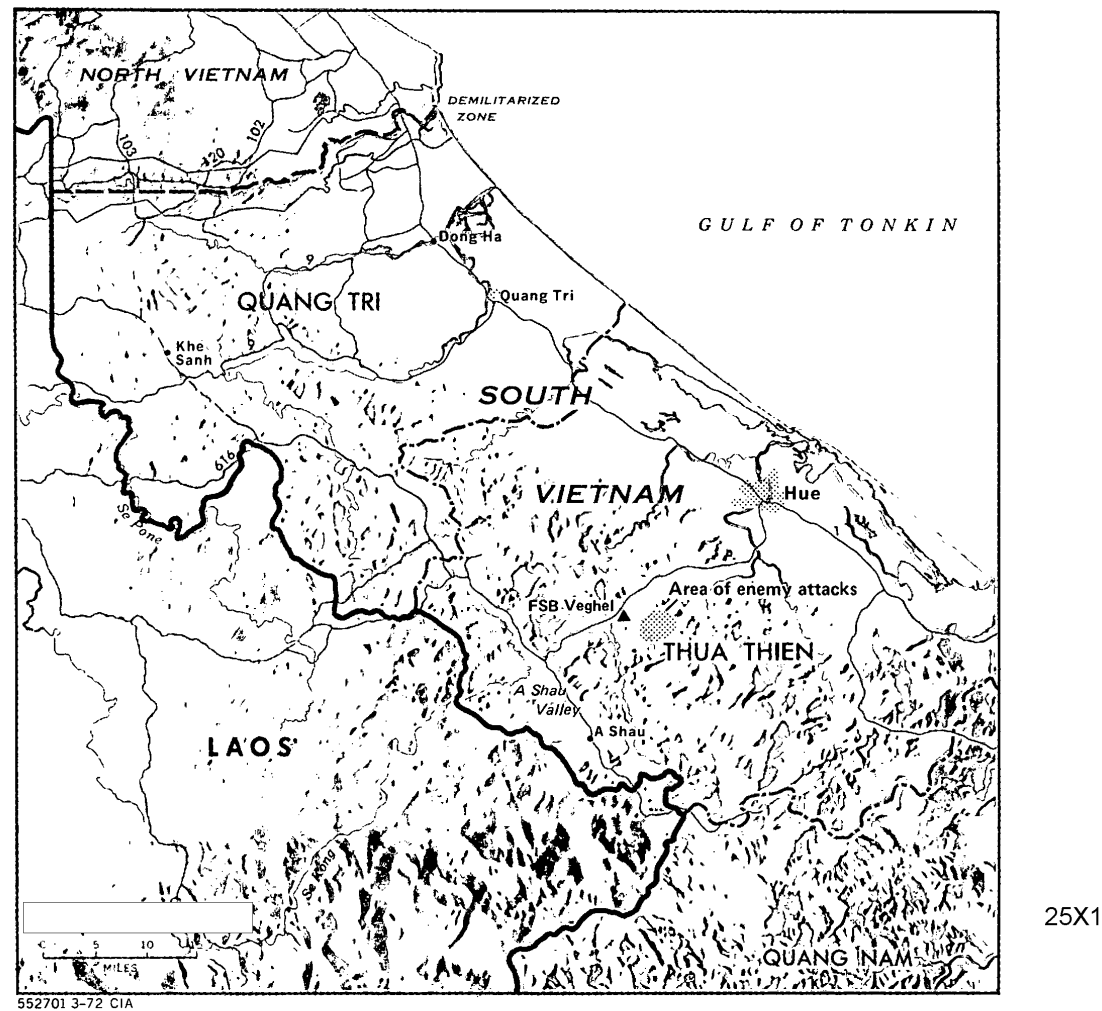
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LAOS

The anticipated assault on Long Tieng is under way. North Vietnamese infantry began hitting government defensive positions on Skyline Ridge overlooking the valley on Saturday. Later on the same day, they forced the remaining government forces from Sam Thong.

Yesterday morning the Communists launched heavy assaults along the length of Skyline Ridge, winning two government defensive positions by mid-afternoon. The enemy directed heavy artillery and mortar fire at the rest of the Long Tieng complex. The government is using all available air support to stem the Communist drive.

North Vietnamese preparations for this assault have been evident for several weeks. Apparently the Communists' timetable was set back by logistics problems, aggravated by government air strikes and diversionary ground operations. Given the Communists' logistics problems, this could be their last good opportunity to take the Long Tieng Valley during the current dry season.



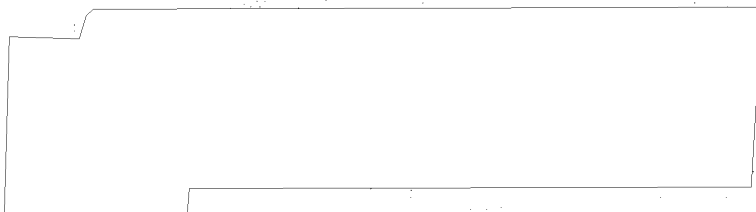
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SOUTH VIETNAM

Sharp fighting broke out less than 20 miles southwest of Hue over the weekend. More than two Communist battalions, supported by shellings totaling some 150 large-caliber rockets and over 1,000 rounds of mortar fire, attacked South Vietnamese field positions blocking enemy main forces moving from the mountains toward coastal targets.

According to the South Vietnamese, Communist losses in the weekend action totaled 280 killed and more than 215 weapons lost; the South Vietnamese lost 27 killed and 83 wounded. The enemy unit involved in these battles has been identified as the North Vietnamese 6th Regiment, which moved eastward from the Laos border during February. Other Communist main force units appear to be moving in the same direction.

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CAMBODIA

The appointment of Son Ngoc Thanh as prime minister should ease political tensions. President Lon Nol picked Thanh, who served as prime minister briefly in 1945, after five other candidates had turned down the post. The 63-year-old Thanh's anti-Sihanouk credentials and his reputation for honesty should mollify the restive students and others who have been agitating against royalist tendencies and corruption. Thanh has few enemies among influential politicians. His support within the military establishment is uncertain, but he has close ties with the Khmer Krom, the army's elite fighting force.



Son Ngoc Thanh

Lon Nol evidently intends to keep Thanh on a short leash. Thanh, who will serve concurrently as foreign minister, told the press that he accepted the prime ministership without conditions

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An intercepted message indicates that although decisions are not final, military officers will receive several key ministries and there will be some civilian holdovers.

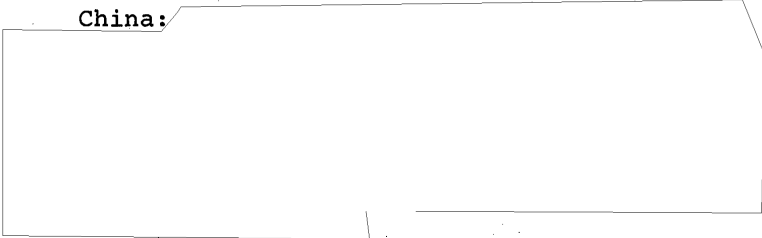
Thanh's appointment seems to have precluded any important post for Sirik Matak, with whom the new prime minister has been at odds for years. The energetic Thanh, who unlike Sirik Matak, is not close to Lon Nol, could soon become frustrated with Lon Nol's restraints and his constant interference in the government's day-to-day affairs.

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NOTES

Arab States - Jordan: The Confederation of Arab Republics (Egypt, Syria, and Libya) has rejected King Husayn's West Bank proposal, terming it a unilateral effort to solve a pan-Arab problem. The confederation statement does not explicitly charge that Husayn made a secret deal with the Israelis, but suspicion of such an agreement is implicit in the document. Palestinian resistance leaders, meanwhile, continue to denounce the proposal, and on 17 March Fatah radio said an emergency meeting of the Fatah central committee reiterated its determination to overthrow Husayn.

China:



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